

Investing in infant and toddler child care to strengthen working families ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excepted from introduction and summary

The first few years of a child's life are profoundly consequential in terms of brain development and growth. In a matter of a few months, a typically developing infant or toddler will move through milestones fast enough to make their parent's head spin—if it isn't already spinning from the turmoil of financial stressors that come with a new addition to the family. Many young parents are just starting out in the workforce, hoping to give their children a bright future while struggling to afford the very immediate costs of raising a baby. This presents an exceptional opportunity for public policies that can support young families during this critically important stage.

By increasing public investment in child care from birth to age 5, the early care and education system can be made more equitable for parents and children. Today, families with greater resources have many more choices when it comes to child care. For most parents, child care choices are constrained by the high cost of providing care for an infant or toddler. With few affordable options, some parents leave the workforce out of necessity rather than choice, which can have a compounding effect on lifetime earnings and savings. This circumstance disproportionately affects women and has been identified as one of the primary reasons that the United States now trails other economically developed nations when it comes to female labor force participation.

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